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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 004322

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE URGES FILIPINOS TO
MOVE BEYOND POLITICAL DIVISIONS

REF: A. MANILA 4271

[B](#). MANILA 4199

[C](#). MANILA 3946

[D](#). VATICAN 500

[E](#). MANILA 3167

Classified By: Political Officer Timothy L. Cipullo
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) On September 13 the Permanent Council of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) issued a sequel to its pastoral statement of July 2005, calling on Filipinos to move beyond the current political turmoil and to "address the more important and urgent problem of grinding poverty of our people." The statement does not depart significantly from the group's Pastoral Statement of July 10, in which it called on President Arroyo to do what is best for the country, but stopped short of calling for her resignation. It appears the CBCP will maintain its neutral position regarding the current political turmoil, at least during the tenure of its current president, Davao Archbishop Fernando Capalla, who will step down in December.

2. (U) The Council reminded members of the Church that lay organizations and movements ("as baptized Catholics") have a responsibility in the political arena, but cautioned against "inordinate involvement in activities that further oppress the poor and divide the people." The statement also cautioned that the search for truth must be "guided by the principles of the rule of law provided for in the Constitution."

3. (U) Malacanang praised the statement as "wise" and "enlightening." Cabinet Secretary Ricardo Saludo stated at a September 13 press conference, "Let us all heed the preaching of the bishops for peace, truth, sobriety, rule of law and the upliftment of our poor kababayan (countrymen)." On September 12, the day before the CBCP Permanent Council met, President Arroyo joined several prominent Church leaders at the "National Day of Intense Prayer for Peace," before flying to New York later in the day. At this meeting, Cebu Archbishop Ricardo Cardinal Vidal hinted at the statement to come when he called on members of the Opposition to accept the results of the impeachment process, saying that their efforts to stir up street protests against the dismissal of the impeachment complaint were increasing public cynicism.

4. (C) Comment: The September 13 statement by the Permanent Council maintains the CBCP's position of not taking sides in the dispute between the Arroyo Administration and the Opposition. This is in line with the posture of staying out of politics advocated by the head of the Church in the Philippines, Manila Archbishop Gaudencio Rosales (ref a) and encouraged by the Vatican (ref d). Individual members of the CBCP have expressed widely divergent views regarding the present political turmoil. However, under the leadership of current president Archbishop Fernando Capalla, the CBCP appears unlikely to change its official position. Capalla's two-year term as CBCP president ends in December. Archbishop Angel Lagdameo, from Jaro in Iloilo province will succeed him. Many observers believe Lagdameo is more inclined toward political activism than Capalla. However, Lagdameo has thus far publicly maintained that the CBCP will retain its position vis a vis the political turmoil after he assumes the presidency. End Comment

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